

***The Advanced Teachings of Mrs. Langerhorn: 14
FISBO Negotiation: Get Thyself to a Neutral Corner***

by Klarise Yahya, Commercial Loan Broker

Note to the Reader ... These are not the notes of our conversations that were published earlier under the title “Mitochondria Learns to Invest”. These are the papers Mrs. Langerhorn left me after she passed away. They are her advanced teachings, and as such they overlap and reinforce her earlier principles. I hope you gain from them as much as I did. The earlier lessons are incorporated in the book “Stairway to Wealth” available at LuLu.com

The report provided by the private detective we hired indicated the property was owned by a Mrs. Mehatabel. It was originally held as “husband and wife”, but the husband part died twelve years prior. I guess that helped to explain the property’s condition. If it were me, however, I would have hired a property manager and kept the place up to snuff so it could be rented. I hoped it would be lucky for us that she apparently never thought of that.

That afternoon, right after work, we drove over to see her. We parked at the curb across the street from Mrs. Mehatabel’s house. Her yard was overgrown and the house was kind of beat up, just like her units down the street. I thought that might be a good sign. I sure hoped we could get the units, but even if we didn’t, my husband told me many times, there’ll be other properties that will come up and as long we have the down payment money in the bank, we’ll be in the driver’s seat. Thank goodness for the miracle of refinancing!

I got out of the car by myself, not waiting for my husband to come around and open the door for me. As we were crossing the street I noticed an old man mowing the grass in the yard next to Mrs. Mehatabel’s. He had an old fashioned push mower and stopped his work to watch as we climbed the three front porch steps to her door. My husband knocked as I sort of aimlessly looked around. I noticed cobwebs on the porch ceiling, by the light. There was no answer, so my husband knocked harder. The old man said loudly, speaking like someone hard of hearing, “She never answers the front door. You gotta go around back”. We smiled and nodded our thanks. He continued to watch us as we went to the side of the house. Our way was blocked by a padlocked gate.

The old man, still watching everything we did announced, helpfully, “The gate’s always locked”. He observed us standing there for a moment, clearly having left our wits elsewhere, before he said, “You can come through my yard. You can get to her place that way. That’s how I get things to her.”

My husband recovered himself faster than I. He couldn’t let that go without inquiry. “You look after her, then?” “Yep. Been doin’ for her for ten years or so, now. What

business did you have with her? You know, everybody's been comin' for her apartments but she won't never sell."

My husband thought a moment – I could almost see the wheels shifting in his mind – before concluding that he should be this fellow's best friend. "My aunt used to live next to us and I wound up taking care of her the last five or six years. It got to be a real pain in the neck. I don't know how you've been doing it for a decade or more."

We hit pay-dirt. It was exactly the right thing to say.

"Well, I don't mind tellin' you, it's a bother all right. She started ailing just after my wife passed. First, I just started bringing the mail to her. Then one thing got to another, and now I'm doin' most everything for her", he said.

My husband looked over his shoulder at her overgrown yard. He was smiling when he said, "I notice you're especially good on the landscaping". They both laughed.

"Well, not that, really. But I make sure she gets her meals-on-wheels and I take her to the doctor's and make sure she gets her prescriptions and all".

My husband asked, "You mentioned that people have been coming for her apartments. Why hasn't she sold them?"

"It's the cats, probably. She has a house full of 'em. Started feeding a couple of old alley cats after her husband died, and it just grew from there. She wants the apartments to go to the cats, to kind of pay for their needs after she dies. She doesn't have anyone else".

"If you were her", my husband asked the old man, "how would you solve her problem?"

"I don't really know. We've talked about it, of course, but she has no real idea, either".

I jumped into the conversation. "You want to know what I think she could do with the cats?" I didn't wait for a response because the answer might have been no, so I just talked on ahead. "If she's afraid that there would be nobody to look after them, she could talk with an attorney and draw up a Trust. The Trust could write a check to whoever winds up taking care of the cats funding regular check-ups and vet visits. The Trust would take care of the cat costs right up until the last one died." They both ignored me.

My husband stuck his hand out and introduced himself. The old man left his push mower and approached my husband. He took his hand, shook it, and said his name was "Ben. Nothing else", he said, "just Ben". Ben shook my hand next. He needed some of my special skin cream, the one I use only in emergencies. It's really good.

"Well, let me show you how to get to her back door. Just follow me".

Ben turned to his right and started walking down the fence-line. It wasn't too far, but my husband didn't want to lose the opportunity. "Ben, what do you think of that Trust idea?" "Well," he said, "It's not my place to say, but she's gettin' older and pretty much has to do something kind of soon".

There was a gate at the far end of Ben's lot. He opened it and led the way through. My husband went next, and I was last as we walked towards Mrs. Mehatabel's back door. She had a porch at the rear, too. We climbed the steps. She opened the door. I gagged. "Well, Ben", she said, "what do we have here? More buyers?"

"They wanna talk to you about the units, Annabelle. Seem like nice folks." She turned to my husband. "Do you want to come inside, or would you rather we talk out here on the back porch?" I noticed she had a kinky little smile on her face when she said that.

My husband smiled back. "We were hoping you would come with us to McDonald's. We could have a coffee while we talked."

Mrs. Mehatabel and my husband both laughed, as though they were sharing a secret joke. It seemed like they were getting along. I was still trying to hold my breath and I could tell my face was getting flushed.

"Want to join us, Ben?" my husband asked.

"Naaa. I'll just finish the yard".

My husband turned to Mrs. Mehatabel. "My name is John Langerhorn. This is my wife, Mrs. Langerhorn." To third parties, John always referenced me formally. When I referred to him when talking to others, I always said "Mr. Langerhorn". I don't know why, it just seemed the thing to do. I never could get comfortable with first names, except, of course, when addressing children. I understand that in California they have different standards.

Mrs. Mehatabel gave me a nod. "Well, let's get going, then. You can buy me dinner, while we're at it."

My husband once told me that a friend had told him that the first thing to do when you negotiate with someone is to drive them away from "their" territory. My husband called it "going to a neutral corner". McDonald's is about as neutral as you can get, I suppose. And as long as she was in our car, we had a little more control over the length of the meeting. The more I thought about it, the more I thought the friend was right.

She was finishing her fries, using them like tiny spoons to scoop catsup into her mouth, when she pretty much affirmed what Ben had already told us. "I'm not going to sell those units. They are for my cats after I'm gone."

My husband put his coffee down, made eye contact with her, and said, "The executor of your estate, then, will be which cat?" He continued with eye contact.

Mrs. Mehatabel flustered up and couldn't say anything for a moment. Finally,

she sputtered “That doesn’t seem very nice. Why are you mocking me”?

He didn’t respond to the question. Instead, he simply pointed out that if the cats were left wandering through her house after she died they would most likely be taken to the pound by Animal Regulation. “And”, he added, “you know what that means”.

Mrs. Mehatabel became snappish. “I know that”, she said, “but I’ve made arrangements in my will. They’ll be taken care of.”

“What have you done? Provided money to someone to look after the cats? What’s going to stop her from taking the money and throwing your cats out?” I noticed how my husband used the emotionally charged “your cats”. I was so proud of him. Mrs. Mehatabel’s eyes started to fill up. Life is good.

*Klarise Yahya is a Commercial Loan Broker. If you are thinking of refinancing or purchasing five units or more anywhere in the U.S.A., **Klarise Yahya** can help. **Find out how much you can borrow!** For a complimentary mortgage analysis, please call her at **(818) 500-9966***